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THEY AND THE TOWER

A POEM

BY
DANIEL RAY FINE

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THE
TEMPLE AND THE TOWER:

A POEM
ON THE
GRANITE CITY FIRE.

BY
LOUIS MENZIES.



Thus temples, towers, will tumble o'er,
And globes themselves shall shrink away
Like crumbling crusts, and strew Time's shore
And oceans melt into their spray;
But we, when savage nature cries,
On quenched worlds at last will rise!



ABERDEEN:
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Dedicated,

SANS ROGANS,

TO ALEXANDER WALKER, ESQ.,

DEAN OF GUILD,

FOR WHOSE KINDNESS AND LITERARY CONVERSATION

I HOPE I WILL FOR EVER FEEL GRATEFUL.

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PREFACE.



DEAR READER,

It is now a few years since we had a little public chat; and the circumstance, though of little consequence to any one, yet raises in myself a few very enslaving reflections. In that little time even, what has not been done in European legislation—confederate diplomacy—popular sovereignty—civic policy, and the associate, though lesser establishments of municipal government and local jurisdictions. The person is surely neither very wise nor grateful who does not look down with a glad and hopeful eye upon his native city as well as his nation, when his senses and intellect are so abundantly indulged by both. But I often think that nationality, like locality, is a narrow thing. Our political sympathy and penetration should travel like the beautiful balance of the seasons—staying a little longer here than there, yet cosmopolite in their journey. This is too little taught. To be true Statesmen, or true human beings, we must, in a comprehensive sense, have no religion but humanity, and no country but the world. Only three Statesmen, in my political memory, have shown this sentiment in their lives—the one in

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exact and oratorical language; and the others, Bright and Gladstone, in the splendid oratory of deeds. The history of the last few years has given us all much to rejoice at, and more to be grateful for. Progress not only exists but is progressive. Like Homer's gods, it looks not back. It may be symbolised as a delicate yet heroic female, whose occupation from the earliest times has been to lead the car of civilisation, and though hindered in every age, determines to march even amid her tears. She is silently driving the thin wedge of constitutional government into every country in Europe. In the relaxed land tenure of Russia—the Protestant and political suffrages of Italy and Germany—the extended political guarantees of provincial France, and the almost incredible liberalism of republican and Non-conformist England, we hear the chaste echoes of her steps. Progress is really a principle of nature more steady than riotous, coming not with the wild impulse of a tide, but with all the quietness of a closing flower. All that is truly good is slow. "Twere well if all that is slow were truly good!

In a preface to this production, I would like to thank the critics, one and all, for their observations on my intellectual child, *The Don*. Perhaps the most concentrated gratitude would be to say that to me they have been most impartially favourable. I hope I will ever be able to say, without self-deception, that the highest motive in these prose and poetic productions, is the humblest—to try and sow a few seeds of quiet-

ness and kindness before going hence. I have been reminded often that I am in arrears a canto. Well, this is on the right side ; for too many writers seek the public, when the public should be allowed to seek them. We should all try to write ourselves into reputation, not out of it. In this I have taken the terse advice of my friend, the Dean of Guild, viz., to write too little rather than too much.

In "The Temple and the Tower," accident has once more been the mother of invention, and I hope it will stand as excuse for *The Don*. Indeed, that son of transgression might have appeared ere now, but really I don't know what to do with him—whether to drown him, hang him, or shoot him, in the closing scene. No child ever perplexed a parent so much. But I will see my friend, Mr. Emslie Smith, the advocate, anent this.

These lines, thrown out in a fit of poetic sadness, seek to picture, as near as possible, what I cannot help thinking was the most graphic display of fire possibly in this world—having for the theatre of its terrible manifestation so confined an area as a churchyard, and contracted to one huge focus in the temple, stamps it as unique.

I have often felt that a total eclipse of sound, so to speak, was as insupportably sad as a total eclipse of light ; and from the keynote of this feeling came the opening verses. To me the Sabbath morning came on funeral wing, and the noon, shorn of its bells,

seemed equally sad ! But, reader, let us be funny for a moment. I have no doubt you will allow that I have beat our mutual friend, Mr. Wilson, for once at least. The humblest poet, you know, is more than a match for a photographer. A photographer, even with all the spectacles of the universe on his nose, will fail to register a fire with his lens, even though he should plant himself in its midst. But I suppose the balance is equal at this point ; for both photographer and poet would feel the bosom of nature perhaps a little too warm, if so near it ; only the photographer would dissolve first.

One word more on a text that makes every man an orator, viz., cash. As we are all truly sorry at this calamity, a mere copper will suffice for the tribute of Cæsar. Sorrow should not be taxed. At least, I will leave this to the next Tory Chancellor, who is better acquainted with the true objects of taxation than your humble servant.

LOUIS MENZIES.

THE TEMPLE AND THE TOWER.



I.

Ring, Sabbath bells ! ring, Sabbath bells !

We list'ning wait thy wonted song ;

Thy echoes, like departed spells,

In memory's ear peal loud, peal long ;

This first deserted morning shake—

This saddening stillness break, oh, break !

II.

Ring, Sabbath bells ! ring, Sabbath bells !

Kind monitors of perished years,

Who oft proclaimed in changing knells

A nation's joy, an orphan's tears : .

This silent morn to music make ;

Thou Sabbath glory, wake, oh, wake !

III.

Thou'lt wake no more. The parent voice
Is now, alas ! for ever still,
That told the hour when stars rejoice,
Or sunrise clambers o'er the hill.
Slow sinking from the falling tower,
It "faltered" forth its latest hour.

IV.

'Twas scarcely night along the sky,
'Twas but day's shadow coming down ;
A breeze, soft as a troubled sigh,
At times caressed the quiet town ;
And trembling stars their glory shed
Upon each lonely churchyard bed.

V.

Within the old brown burial wall
The solemn temple stands alone,
And doubly peaceful, save the call
Of choral voices briefly thrown ;
As falls the swan's last ebbing cries,
And then in wasting sweetness dies.

VI.

Dim stood the tower in twilight shade,
That marked the history—the doom—
The strength—the hope—the pain—the aid—
The travelled light—the travelled gloom—
The sinking power—the changed decrees—
The shadows of lost centuries !

VII.

Like some beseeching power it stood,
Untired by time, as ages fled,
Between the evil and the good,
Between the living and the dead.
Upon this clock tower's beating breast,
The homeless-wild fowls crouch to rest.

VIII.

Where autumn blue-bells deck the grave,
To where the loving ivy climbs,
The sepulchre's gray solitude
Now with security entwines,
This graveyard scene, with temple-tower,
Lay quiet as a closed flower.

IX.

Hark ! 'tis a startled raven's cry,
Some new-born terror rises near ;
Chained by the fate that bids it fly,
It trails its ruffling wings in fear.
A flash lits up the roof of night,
And havoc hovers red in sight !

X.

In yellow lines the solemn pile
Is chalked along the dewy grass ;
Flame kisses flame, and dreadful smile,
As o'er their victim's head they pass,
And altering, flashed from pale to red,
Across each sleeper's grassy bed.

XI.

Great panting waves of circling smoke,
Transparent, with appalling light,
Through miles of midnight, toiled and broke,
And reeled and tumbled, darkly bright,
And coiling, wreathing, bursting rolled
Out from the temple's yawning hold.

XII.

The shock—the shout—the crackling tone,
Anticipate the gaping doom
Of corridors, of roof, of altar thrown
Through burning and disordered gloom ;
Then flames a moment ceased from toil,
And revelled on congenial soil.

XIII.

Now rising from the famished wood,
Fierce round the ravished walls they go,
Like vultures seeking newer food,
Or murderers for some newer foe—
Midnight assassins, torch in hand,
Below the tower at last they stand!

XIV.

Each grated window, bars and brass,
Fast grappled by the curling flame,
With tumbling heaps of shivered glass,
Drop in the surge that went and came,
Melted to rain with sulphurous smell,
Ran through this atmosphere of Hell!

XV.

Fierce hissing, reddening o'er the walls,
Then madly drifting o'er the town,
In waving course now rise, now falls—
Now scorching hot, at last come down
A flood of sparks, which slowly breaks
To one wide waste of burning flakes.

XVI.

But hotter still the volume glows,
Scorching each nook with tyrant force,
Yet wild and more insurgent flows ;
Above the temple's black'ning corse
It flies aloft. Hark ! strikes the hour
That dooms the unsuspecting tower.

XVII.

In twisting strength it rolls on high,
Recoiling, rising, wilder flings
Its clenching fangs, towards the sky,
And to the tower more eager clings,
Till to the top at last they came,
A spiral pyramid of flame !

XVIII.

Fearfully now the old oak beams—
The turret doors—the tumbling stair—
Hurl headlong through the fiery streams
That sweep the fragments through the air,
And blazing, crackling, all around,
With lighted fragments strew the ground.

XIX.

Or in their wide and black'ning reach,
Cast by a gust that rocked the night,
Full many a firebrand strewed the beach,
Or on a thousand housetops light ;
And after each wide flaming gust,
The city filled with choking dust.

XX.

Blazing, though bent, the tower still stood,
An imploring skeleton of fire,
Stripped by the flames' remorseless mood ;
At last it reeled from root to spire.
Expiring glory, tempest tossed,
One moment more—now all is lost !

XXI.

'Tis frenzy's hour ; the furnace boils,
And hisses like a local hell,
And smiles exulting o'er its spoils,
And mocks each fallen silent bell,
As o'er the whole the flame still pass'd,
The sole monopolist at last.

XXII.

But fainter now the shadows red
Flit o'er the town and midnight shore :
The temple smoulders by the dead ;
The tower, alas ! is now no more.
Its bells all buried, one by one,
Now blacken in the morning sun.

XXIII.

The clock—kind, ceaseless monitor—

By night a guide, a friend by day ;

Its hands, alas ! no more will stir—

Its beaming face has passed away.

The funeral night-fowl claps his wings

Out o'er the wreck of former things.

XXIV.

O Time ! O Time ! to-day we cry

Like children, and the next day sing :

Vain voices ours, that live and die,

As wasted thought or passions spring ;

As hopes arise, or shadows blind,

So wastes our night or noon of mind.

XXV.

Midst busy life—midst busy death,
Where weary, wasted forms appear,
The breaking hearts, the sick'ning breath,
For these, for these, where is the tear ?
Oh, how faintly do we see
The moisten'd eye of sympathy !

XXVI.

Thus temples, towers, will tumble o'er,
And globes themselves will shrink away
Like crumbling crusts, and strew Time's shore,
And oceans melt into their spray ;
But we, when savage nature cries
On quenched worlds, at last will rise !



